

Architecture and the stereoscopic space of experience

Schawn Jasmann, Greg Andonian

School of Architecture, Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada

s@schawn.com, GregAndonian@pigeon.carleton.ca, www.schawn.com/

The conceptualization of architectural space is undergoing radical innovation. Architect-designers have become perceptual painters of animate experience through the use of digital stereoscopic technologies that permit the sensorial intensity of an experience of movement, color, form, and space. It is in creating such direct experiences for a client-user that this becomes defined as a necessary phase prior to the abstractive and pragmatic phases of design. This creates a new originating context -- a new paradigm -- to which a client-user will refer, thus creating an alternate model for design programming.

Architecture, Stereo Space, Synesthesia, Inscription, Anthropomorphism

Introduction

Architecture has long been concerned with the body's critical role in the shaping of culturally significant symbolic orders of human experience. The role of the body within architectural production today takes as a point of departure the tradition of anthropomorphism. However, in working with the human body, new ways of understanding the world have resulted in the construction of a body of knowledge much like the anthropomorphic methods concerning "manners of perception" (Fascari, 1991) relating to spatial inhabitation. These new understandings of bodily consciousness exist within digital stereoscopic environments. Through the employment of the latest digitally interactive visualization technologies, contemporary artists have created alternate modes of bodily mediation that have revealed new embodied experiences. These new digital expressions bring forth multiple transformations of the idea of inscription in relation to the body through which new strategies for orientation towards the design of architecture are revealed.

Inscriptive Anthropomorphism

Marco Fascari, in his book "Monsters of Architecture", has claimed that the employment of an anthropomorphic method must be considered in the production of architecture today. He posits that there must be a corporeal presence within architecture that is initiated at the stage of conception and developed through the practice of architectural drawing. For Fascari, this corporeality must yield an imaginative and meaningful body-image that results from the coalescence of sensation, representation and perception. (Fascari, 1991) In so doing, it will result in an architecture that embodies a "well-being", one that creates a condition conducive to apprehending the timeless space / form relation through an anchored bodily presence and experience. His version of architecture opens itself up to new figurative means of thinking about bodies interacting with other bodies, an ultimate corpus of body images from which to construct and construe the true substance of dwelling within the space-time of architecture. What is curious is how this approach, one that is dominantly employing transformation, inscription and the body, may reveal the invisible corporeality of time through the work of another artist/maker, Char Davies, within a different medium, the digital medium.

In the stereoscopic work of Char Davies a conflict arises between the bodily sensation of an immaterial space (virtual) and the visual or retinal mapping of the stereoscopic content. Her work manifests a transformation of the navigator's perceptual experience through the body's reframed consciousness, as psychologist Arthur J. Deikman notes "a 'de-automization' of cognitive structures, an opening to the sensory intensity of objects outside of conceptualized awareness or attachment". (Hansen, 2001)

In Davies' work there is a process of inscribing that occurs at the level of the immersant. It is the immersant who is subject to the will of the virtually rendered stereoscopic landscapes through the act of witnessing and participating in the animated/lived properties of the work. Davies resituates the kinesthetic body in a new body schema, one that questions the immersant's habitual perceptions about being in the world. She is interested in dissolving the Cartesian relationship between mind and body, and between self and world, in order to construct new ways of apprehending the world. (Hansen, 2001)

Char Davies and Marco Frascari share a common desire to render visible the invisible. Frascari promotes the use of the anthropomorphic method in which the human body serves as an integral component in the production processes of creating architecture. It is one where the imagined body-image in the mind of the architect must be transposed within the architectural body through a process of coalescence between sensation, representation and perception. Therefore the bodily act of inscribing is central to the architectural conception, design and production processes. Davies on the other hand creates a new awareness of the human body in relation to the natural world, one where the flesh of the body is understood as the flesh of the world. This awareness is achieved through shifting the emphasis away from vision as an exclusive perceptual system and engaging the body in an affective manner thereby dissolving the boundaries between self and world. The role of inscribing in her work is a critical feature in the creation of a transformation of experience. This transformation makes visible the invisibility of a dormant awareness of the body as the flesh of the world. Bringing this invisibility right to the surface of experience, through a physically, physiologically and psychologically engendered transformation, Davies achieves the realization of Bachelard's desires: "by changing space, by leaving the space of one's usual sensibilities, one enters into communication with a space that is psychically innovating... For we do not change place, we change our nature."(Bachelard, 1969)



Figure 1. Visual Sensorium X1-A.



Figure 2. Visual Sensorium X2-A.

The departure point that challenges architectural thinking and making, as argued by Marco Frascari suggests that the representational space of the image is the space of mental inhabitation and differs from the physical space of the body as it can only be imagined through the metaphoric projection of synesthesia. This anthropomorphic tradition attempts to capture the visceral and tactile material dimensions of the building in order to engage the bodily senses as though one were situated within the spaces of the projected design. Char Davies however manages to fuse the representational space of a fluid image with bodily interaction in order to flesh out a direct encounter that fuses all senses simultaneously, effectively inducing synesthesia. It is therefore apparent that there exist innumerable possibilities for exploring architectural ideas in relation to the digital stereoscopic medium in order to create

heightened sensorial experiences of a synesthetic nature. (Figures 1 and 2) This would achieve a more permeable exchange between a projected representation of the design and the direct bodily experience of the design.

Conclusion

Digital stereoscopic considerations may augment the existing design strategy of an architectural design or they may very well stand alone as part of a systematic approach that exist outside of the application of a subjective set of values. In either case, the turn towards digital stereoscopic technologies as instruments, to be integrated into a larger conceptual framework is necessary towards the desire of integrating physically induced synesthesia with the enabling feature of metaphor. Both the technological condition and the linguistic condition, one of mutual dependency in the explication of the other, can bring to fore the necessary rift, opening, rupture, displacement, disconnect, in order to create the alienated state in which we find an affinity to that space of the imagination to which we travel when we wish to dematerialize our immediate contextual reality. This space is both virtual and real, and shares a likeness to those architectures of the imagination created through the perpetual interaction within a metaphorically enabled field of digital tectonics. It is here where we become enmeshed within the interference noise of perturbed signals, in seeking our way out into the nether regions of the metaphoric architectures of making, through the hand, eye, ear, and nose, within a physically situated and spatially enriched digital space of encounter in which our senses are engaged fully.

References

- Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1969.
- Frasconi, Marco. *Monsters of Architecture: Anthropomorphism in Architectural Theory*. Savage: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1991.
- Hansen, Mark. *Embodying Virtual Reality Touch and Self Movement in the work of Char Davies* (Critical Matrix: The Princeton Journal of Women, Gender and Culture. Vol. 12 (1-2) Making Sense, 2001)